



# INSTRUCT-O-GRAM

## THE HANDS-ON TRAINING GUIDE FOR THE FIRE INSTRUCTOR

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### ***The Many Roles of a Company Officer***

#### **TASK**

"You are the weakest link...Good-bye!!!" A phrase many of us may have heard from the current television program *The Weakest Link*. How true this is in the fire service today. That's right, the fire service is dependent upon the company officer to make the system work and implement the direction and mission set by the Fire Chief. This *Instruct-O-Gram* is focused on the development and education that is imperative for company officers. Strong company officers lead to knowledgeable and efficient crews. The combination leads to missions being carried out.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

1. The firefighter/company officer upon completion should be able to describe the duties of a company officer.
2. The firefighter/company officer upon completion should be able to describe the national standard for competency for fire officers. (NFPA 1021)
3. The firefighter/company officer upon completion should be able to describe the strategies for success as a company officer.

#### **ESTIMATED TEACHING TIME**

This program should not be assigned a time limit for instruction. Take as long as necessary. It is important that the student have a full grasp of the roles and responsibilities of a company officer.

#### **MOTIVATING THE STUDENT**

Many of you have had a company officer who is lazy, hates to come to work and is not very well educated when it comes to the fire service. So how did that individual become that way? We learn by example. Someone in front of them, who was a mentor, mentored in a negative way. It is crucial that today's company officers be much more. We must get beyond using the old saying... "It has been that way since I came 20 years ago". We must break old traditions and find new ways that are more efficient, effective and safer. Company officers are the future of the fire service.

#### **PRESENTATION**

##### **I. NFPA 1021**

- A. Origin and Development of NFPA 1021
- B. Purpose of NFPA 1021
- C. Various Levels of Fire Officer listed in NFPA 1021

##### **II. Responsibilities of a Company Officer**

- A. First line supervisor
  1. Performance of crew
  2. Safety of crew
  3. Emergency operations
  4. Non-emergency activities

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B. Leading others is the company officer's principal job.

1. Developing an efficient company
2. Developing capabilities
3. Fostering good morale

### III. Roles of the Company Officer

#### A. Coach

1. Company officers teach and help develop personnel in a multitude of ways not just limited to fire service but to other aspects of life. So how do we coach?
  - a. Allow individuals to tryout different roles.
  - b. Give assignments that will help the firefighter to enhance weak areas.
    - ◆ Areas that can be addressed through outside training
    - ◆ Tasks that are not usually performed at their level
  - c. Allow them to exercise their talents after being taught.
    - ◆ Let them make mistakes that will create a positive learning experience. It has been said that experience is the best teacher. Training and non crucial functions can provide prominent information that will be later used in "cued" decision making.
  - d. Encourage the firefighter to get involved in the department at a much higher level than just coming in and doing their job. There is a lot more that could be done in the form of special projects that chief officers or manpower does not address oftentimes due to lack of time. This will allow them to have an insight of the next organizational level.

#### B. Counselor

1. Everyone makes mistakes or needs guidance. Being able to provide information and guidance to personnel will help them reach their goals learning from mistakes. These mistakes help develop and build cued information for future decision making processes.
2. A counselor is there to lead people and give guidance in every aspect. The following are some good rules to follow.
  - a. Tell them what they don't want to always hear...The truth!
  - b. Don't be afraid to correct problems, actions or

other aspects immediately. Waiting can lead to confusion.

- c. Don't sugar coat it.
- d. Shoot straight from the hip, don't try to be buddies.

#### C. Decision Maker

1. Every company officer will be in the hot seat and have to make decisions. This routinely happens multiple times a day. Training, education, experience and foresight will help in the decision making process.
2. When making decisions refer back to your training and experience. This is the "Cued Decision Making" talked about earlier.
3. Take a few seconds to get the big picture. You should always use the fisheye or window to the wider world approach. Look at the entire picture not just a portion.
  - a. Avoid tunnel vision.
  - b. Get all the facts.
  - c. Take time to think before you act.
  - d. Utilize your resources and expertise.
  - e. Make training count in real life.

#### D. Firefighter

1. In a perfect world the company officer would only direct crews during operations. In the real world, the company officer will be engaged in fire operations performing firefighter duties as they work with the company in a team environment.
2. Don't forget your role though. You are the team leader not the firefighter on the nozzle.
3. Utilize your firefighting knowledge and experience to make decisions as an officer.
4. Remember the safety of the crew is your responsibility.

#### E. Friend

1. This is a narrow line with a large gray area on either side. A company officer must be able to separate friendship from business when necessary. However, a company officer may be just that, a friend, as a strong shoulder to lean on during a tough personal time to just a listening ear. Do not confuse friendship with earned respect.
2. It is important to remember that even though you may be a friend one minute you may have to switch roles instantaneously. The switch from friend to supervisor is one that must clearly be understood.



## F. Innovator

1. In today's society budgets are not loaded with money to burn. However, the needs of the fire service have changed. In times of limited budgets the company officer must learn to be innovative. Finding new ways to increase performance, training and ways to meet the department mission statement.
2. A company officer must learn to be innovative for other reasons.
  - a. Finding new ways to make training successful
  - b. Finding and utilizing local resources to your advantage
  - c. Finding new ways to provide services to the population you serve
  - d. Advancing the fire service to a new level
  - e. Better serve delivery on current problems

## G. Instructor

1. The company officer is the true instructor of the fire service. More education takes place at the company level in one day than in every major conference in a year. It is important that the company officer be an instructor. Education can build not only knowledge; the by-products of education produce much more for the fire service as a whole.
2. Ensuring daily response readiness of your crew
3. Delivering education programs on safety to the community
4. Encouraging education and knowledge sharing among colleagues

## H. Leader

1. Each day when administration goes home for the evening with whom do they leave the functions of the department? That's correct, the company officer. Company officers must be leaders. No other public safety supervisor has more monetary responsibility for equipment, life, and property than a company officer. Just think...1 Tower Ladder, 1 Engine, 1 Rescue and 5 square miles with a population of 20,000 residents. Large responsibility!
2. As a leader people will be looking to you for a variety of aspects. These aspects will range from what to do on a scene to advice concerning career decisions.

## I. Manager

1. We manage not only personnel, but daily responsibilities to meet the mission statement.
2. Management of personnel is one of the most difficult roles of an officer. To manage means several things.
  - a. To direct or control the use of: personnel, resources, equipment, and talents
  - b. To exert control over. Company officers have more control over day-to-day operations than any chief. We typically decide what the priorities are and carry out the necessary tasks to complete them, keeping the department mission statement in mind.
  - c. To succeed in accomplishing one's purpose. So now what is your purpose? This question may be asked more frequently than some may realize. Your purpose is to provide the very best service to the citizens you serve with the resources you have.
  - d. Your resources are important. A good manager can develop their resources to assist in accomplishing one's purpose, the department mission statement. But what else does this development do?
    - ◆ Develops future managers
    - ◆ Allows opportunities for coaching, leading, motivating and much more.

## J. Mentor

1. A young firefighter looks at you after a large fire which was successfully attacked and extinguished and says "I want to be just like you when I become a company officer". This is one of the best compliments you could be paid as a company officer. We thus have a large role to develop and lead people who are the next generations of the fire service. You, as a company officer, are the driving force in educating the future of the fire service.
2. A mentor is much like a coach. One aspect is that we provide help and seek out opportunities for others.

## K. Motivator

1. It is a proven fact that money is a motivator. However, it is a short-term motivator. The human factor has proven to be a much stronger and longer lasting motivator. Whether it is authority or just simple respect for the individual.
2. Authoritative motivation will not bring out peak performances in personnel. They will do what is



asked of them to meet the standards set. This often leaves talent and energy unused.

3. Respect will usually lead to a much higher level being produced. The personnel are doing it out of respect, not out of having to. Motivation in individuals can be created from good mentors.

#### L. Public Relations Representative

1. Who is the first person from the fire department that most citizens have contact with? A company officer. We should be the goodwill representatives for the department, working to meet the mission statement in a professional manner.

#### M. Role Model

1. Role models are like mentors. You are looked up to. Role models set examples. What type of example are you setting?
2. Do as I say not as I do. Where will this get you? Usually nowhere more than demanded respect. All too often there is a double standard when it comes to the officers versus the troops. The old philosophy, "I had to go through it, now it is my turn to give it for a while" often surfaces. Strong leaders lead by example. This is more crucial at the company level. Company officers must set the example for the personnel. That example should be positive, not negative.

#### N. Safety Officer

1. As a company officer our primary goal is to return each and every firefighter to their families following the tour of duty in the same form or better. We are the ones who should be supervising our crews. Part of supervision evolves around the safety of your personnel.

#### O. Student

1. A good company officer is well educated and experienced. Each one of us is a student of the fire service. For company officers to be effective and educate their personnel they must also be well educated themselves.

2. Education is a continual process throughout life. The life of a company officer must be filled with education both formal and non-formal. Without this education, how could the company officer be at the level they should be?

#### P. Supervisor

1. Part of the company officer's role is to ensure the work has been done. This is an easy definition of supervisor. The unique part of being a company officer is that company officers are working foremen.
2. Supervision will not be just on the fireground, but in every aspect of the fire service life.
3. Failure to direct and "lead" personnel will result in a failure of the company at the expense of the department and the communities we serve.

#### Q. Writer

1. Company officers are responsible not only for reports but also for evaluations, press releases, disciplinary actions, documentation, evaluations and much more.
2. Good writing skills are needed in every aspect of the role of a company officer.

## RESOURCES

Fire Officer I Curriculum, Great Oaks Institute of Technology, 2002

North Carolina Fire and Rescue Commission Fire Officer 1 Curriculum, North Carolina Department of Fire Marshal, Ladders Level I, 1992

Company Officer, Clinton Smoke, Delmar Publishers, First Edition, 1999

Fire Officer Standard (NFPA 1021), National Fire Protection Association

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